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## Baucus tells new EPA boss that Libby cleanup raising concerns

Following Senate confirmation Tuesday of Mike Leavitt to head the Environmental Protection Agency, Montana Senator Max Baucus told the EPA administrator new concerns have been raised from Libby residents and officials about the agency's commitment to cleaning up asbestos contamination.

After the 88-8 vote approving Leavitt's nomination, Baucus wrote that Libby residents fear the agency's commitment to cleaning up the town is dwindling.

"I hear again and again from Libby residents that the momentum of EPA seems to be fading," Baucus wrote to Leavitt. "Funding is not forthcoming. Residents are concerned that EPA is shifting its attention to projects in other parts of the country, leaving the people of Libby concerned that cleanup and continued exposure to deadly asbestos will drag on, and on, and on."

Baucus put his support behind Leavitt to head the EPA after receiving a commitment that the former Utah Governor will visit Libby personally and help the town recover from years of

asbestos exposure from the defunct W.R. Grace vermiculite mine that operated there until 1990.

Sen. Hilary Clinton, D-N.Y., withheld her support for the nomination until receiving a similar commitment for residents living in the vicinity of the World Trade Center.

Baucus said the EPA has identified more than 1,300 properties in Libby that still require cleanup and that the agency's timeframe for cleaning up the town has been pushed back from 2004 to 2008. Having been in Libby for three years, Baucus said it's unacceptable that the agency has completed only 10 percent of the cleanup work needed to give the town a clean bill of health.

"The people of Libby intend to bring this negative chapter in their history to a close as soon as possible," Baucus wrote. "They are working overtime everyday to improve their community's economic health by working hard to attract new business and industry. They are working hard to develop long-term health care strategies. In every way they are working

hard to move forward."

He said a focused effort by EPA to ensure Libby achieves a clean bill of health is imperative to the economic, environmental and physical health of Libby residents.